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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AJ](#)

SUBJECT: AZERBAIJANI JOURNALIST ARRESTED ON BRIBERY CHARGES

Classified By: DCM Donald Lu for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

¶1. (SBU) On July 24, Ministry of National Security (MNS) officers detained Mushvig Huseynov, a journalist for the opposition Bizim Yol (Our Way) newspaper, charging him with accepting a bribe (Article 311.1 of the Criminal Code). Later that same day, MNS officers searched Huseynov's home and confiscated two of his computers. According to the Prosecutor General, Huseynov demanded and was in the process of accepting a USD 3,500 bribe from Rizvan Aliyev, chief of the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare's administration department. Huseynov allegedly asked for the bribe in exchange for not publishing derogatory information about Aliyev. Huseynov is denying these charges, according to Huseynov's lawyer Vugar Khasayev. Currently, Huseynov is detained at a local Baku police station. A local court is supposed to decide on July 26 whether Huseynov's pre-trial detention can be extended for three months.

¶2. (SBU) In an official statement concerning Huseynov's arrest, Bizim Yol editor Bahaddin Haziyevev adopted a fairly neutral tone. While the statement cast doubt on Haziyevev's guilt, it noted that "without a court verdict, we cannot say whether Mushvig Huseynov is guilty or not." Post has tried reaching Haziyevev to gather his private views on whether the charges likely are genuine or politically-motivated, but he is not responding.

¶3. (C) Other local commentators also are adopting a wait-and-see tone before making a judgment about the nature of the charges. Turan editor Mehman Aliyev told us it is impossible to assess the validity of the charges because of a dearth of information. Aliyev advised that the court proceedings would be the best indicator of evaluating the MNS' charges. While acknowledging that he had no insider information on the case, Emin Huseynov of the Institute of Reporters' Freedom and Safety suggested to us that the MNS may intentionally have framed Huseynov to deflect recent international criticism from the GOAJ's arrest of journalists. Huseynov observed that the GOAJ might point to this case as an example of corruption among the press.

¶4. (C) Comment: It is too early to evaluate whether the charges against Huseynov are fabricated or real. We note, however, that Bizim Yol is affiliated with the opposition Popular Front Party and its editor Bahaddin Haziyevev was severely beaten by unknown assailants in May 2006. We also note that Bizim Yol has published articles that criticized the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare. Post will continue to monitor this incident.

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